
STORY RELEASE

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Forward Deployed ARG Responds to Landslide in Philippines

Task Force 76 Public Affairs

SIBUYAN SEA -- In support of emergent humanitarian relief efforts in the Republic of the Philippines, Sailors and Marines from the Forward Deployed Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and elements of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade (3D MEB) were called to provide assistance to the victims of a recent landslide in Southern Leyte Feb 17.

USS Essex (LHD 2), USS Harpers Ferry (LSD 49) and elements of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade (3D MEB) immediately left port Subic Bay en route to the disaster zone area

"Our primary mission is to provide as much assistance as possible to the victims of this tragic event," said Capt. Mark E. Donahue, Commodore, Amphibious Squadron Eleven, the Task Group Commander of the Forward Deployed ARG. "We are here to prevent the further loss of life and to mitigate any further suffering."

Continuous days of heavy rain and flooding hit Leyte Island, about 420 miles southeast of Manila, and led to the landslide, which has virtually washed away the farming village of Guinsahugon, as well as two other villages.

The United States has authorized the Philippine Red Cross to use approximately \$50,000 of emergency relief funds already granted to the Red Cross from an earlier disaster to aid in this disaster.

The Philippine Red Cross has asked the United States for helicopter support to assist with rescue and relief operations in the area.

Just as in Operation Unified Assistance (OUA), a multi-nation effort to help victims of the Indonesian tsunami, the ships of the Forward Deployed ARG will use various ship-to-

shore assets to get landslide victims the assistance they need in the form of food, water and medical supplies. During OUA, USS Essex (LHD 2) and USS Fort McHenry (LSD 43) delivered approximately 6 million pounds of relief supplies providing much needed relief to the area.

Fort McHenry also provided humanitarian assistance after a series of early December 2004 typhoons and tropical storms caused massive flooding and landslides on the island of Luzon. During that humanitarian assistance effort, Fort McHenry delivered 30,000 pounds of supplies and helped treat 100 patients, according to U.S. Embassy officials in the Philippines.

USS Essex (LHD 2), USS Harpers Ferry (LSD 49) and elements of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade (3D MEB) arrived in the Republic of the Philippines Feb. 17 to conduct Exercise Balikatan 2006.

Exercise Balikatan 2006, the 22nd in the series, is an annual Republic of the Philippines-U.S. bilateral combined exercise, which was scheduled Feb. 20 through March 5. The purpose of the exercise is to further develop the AFP in crisis action planning, enhancing its ability to effectively conduct counter terrorism operations, and promote interoperability between participating countries. Also emphasized in the training events will be cooperation and execution of humanitarian and civic assistance.

"The strong partnership and professional ties between the Philippines and U. S. military will be instrumental in providing rapid and valuable relief assistance," said Donahue. "We are fortunate to be at the right place to help our friends and their families in their time of need."

The Forward Deployed ARG is part of Task Force 76, the Navy's only forward-deployed amphibious force, which is headquartered at White Beach Naval Facility, Okinawa, Japan, with an operating detachment in Sasebo, Japan.

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